

VIII. OPERATIONS ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

Division of Parks and Recreation staff identified the major park issues facing Cliffs of the Neuse State Park at the initiation of the general management plan process. The issues have been divided into three categories: natural resources (see Chapter VI), capital improvements (see Chapter VII) and operations. This chapter identifies park operations issues and makes recommendations for addressing them during the next five years.

Operations issues for Cliffs of the Neuse State Park that are of significant concern are:

1. Visitor's center
2. Park entrance
3. Lifeguard needs
4. Access to the group camping area
5. Picnic area renovation
6. Hiking trails and outdoor exhibits
7. Crumpler Pond
8. Campground renovations
9. Access road improvements
10. Swim area parking lot drainage

VISITOR'S CENTER

Background

A major concern is the need for a visitor's center for the park. While there is already a capital improvement project to construct a visitor's center at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park, construction of the visitor's center is still a very high priority need for the park.

Currently eight staff work out of a small office suitable for only three or four staff. There is inadequate space for park visitors to speak with park staff or staff to conduct business in private. Ranger staff needs additional space to conduct seasonal interviews, to meet with volunteers, and for the park superintendent to conduct confidential meetings and phone conversations. The current office building is clearly beyond its maximum capacity. There is little storage area for park files, and with the computer and other electronic equipment in use today, the electrical service is beyond its designed capacity.

The visitor's center is also badly needed to meet visitor needs. There is no adequate indoor facility in the park to conduct Environmental Education programs for the public. The lack of such a facility limits the number and types of interpretive programs that can be offered by the ranger staff. With a new visitor's center, the park could better serve school groups. A new visitor's center would also include needed exhibit space. The exhibits in the current museum have been in place for 25 years and are in need of

updating and replacement. The location of the current museum on the high ridge adjacent to the cliffs makes it necessary to close the building during storms due to the likelihood of lightning strikes.

Recommendations

Construct a visitor's center to better serve the public and to provide adequate office space for park staff. Once a visitor's center is constructed that provides new exhibits, convert the existing museum building into a classroom.

PARK ENTRANCE

Background

The park entrance road (state road 1743) runs perpendicular from N.C. 111 into the park. Just outside the park gate, state road 1742 crosses the park entrance road. At the crossing, state road 1742 has stop signs from both directions that give the right-of-way to traffic on the park entrance road. At times, traffic speeds at this intersection are faster than they should be to remain safe. The park entrance road dips just inside the park gate, and it is difficult for traffic to turn from state road 1742 into the park with a clear line of sight. To date, park staff is unaware of any serious accidents that have occurred at the intersection.

Recommendations

The park superintendent will consult with the N.C. Department of Transportation to determine what should be done to make the intersection safer. Signing the intersection for a four-way stop and a request to have the speed limit lowered to 45 miles-per-hour will be requested.

LIFEGUARD NEEDS

Background

Staff positions at Cliffs of the Neuse are generally adequate to meet the park needs at the present time, except that an additional 40-hour seasonal lifeguard is needed. The existing staffing levels for the swim area was established in the 1950s when the swim area was first opened. With the recent changes in safety requirements and the Swim Area Guidelines, the swim area has had to be closed many times in the past two or three years, primarily during the week.

Recommendations

Hire an additional 40-hour seasonal lifeguard.

ACCESS TO THE GROUP CAMPING AREA

Background

The group camping area is located on the northern side of the park. Most of the access road to the group camp is located on private property. The park does not have a lease agreement for this use, but operates with the knowledge and consent of the cooperating landowner. Hiking in to the group camp across park property is possible, but is not very practicable.

Private property adjacent to the group camp is hunted, and these hunted lands come within 400 feet of the group camps. The small distance from these hunted lands to the group camps is insufficient buffer. The access road itself, which the park has been using for many years, has recently begun to be hunted by the landowner's family. This new hunting use has caused some controversy with the landowner of the access road, so in order to continue to use the access for park purposes, the group camps have been closed for the past two years during the fall hunting season. The fall season is one of the most popular times for camping.

Recommendations

The park superintendent will contact the Division safety officer about the issue of hunting in close proximity to the group camps to obtain an assessment and recommendations, and then follow through on these. Land acquisition staff will contact the adjacent landowners and pursue land acquisition of the adjacent parcels in order to obtain permanent access and to provide additional land to buffer the group camp.

PICNIC AREA RENOVATION

Background

A project to provide for renovations to the picnic area is also on the current capital improvement list, however, additional consideration needs to be given to making the old shelter accessible to persons with disabilities. The large, old picnic shelter built in 1948, while in good condition, is located further from the parking lot than is desirable for easy access, and the access path drops down and then rises as it approaches the shelter. The shelter is also very dark, and additional lighting is needed for picnickers and for use of the shelter for interpretive programs. The shelter could be better used for interpretive programs and other uses if electrical outlets were installed. The area in front of the shelter is terraced with numerous rows of landscape timbers that are unsightly and that are a maintenance and safety problem. Construction of a new restroom facility, to be located closer to the parking lot, started in the spring of 2004. The new restroom will be accessible for persons with disabilities.

Recommendations

Construct a path from the current parking lot to the shelter that meets accessibility standards. Improve lighting under the shelter by adding skylights on the backside of the roof or other means. Construct a vehicle road from the current parking lot to the old shelter and mark 2 or 3 handicapped parking spaces at the shelter for people with disabilities. The road would also be used to transport elderly citizens closer to the shelter and to serve emergency access and maintenance needs. Add electrical outlets. Remove the current terracing in front of the picnic shelter. Regrade and fill the area as needed, and construct a retaining wall in order to provide a larger, relatively flat and more useable area close to the shelter. Revise the existing capital improvement project scope to include these additional work items.

HIKING TRAILS AND OUTDOOR EXHIBITS

Background

The park has approximately 1.7 miles of trail, and all of the trails are old and in need of major renovation. Damage from hurricanes, floods and ice storms in recent years has added to the erosion damage that has taken place over many years. Some staff repair work has been done, but the total amount of work needed exceeds what staff has been able to accomplish. In addition, the park could use more trails. The existing length is insufficient for a park with camping and the other facilities that Cliffs of the Neuse offers. Some boardwalk design work has already been done. The park also needs more and better outdoor exhibits related to the cliffs, the seven natural communities and the aquatic habitats.

Recommendations

Create a new capital improvement project to include the renovation of the existing park trails and to construct a new hiking trail that will lead to Crumpler Pond. The project will include pedestrian bridges and trailside exhibits for both the old trails and the new one. A covered shelter to house a core drilling of the cliff will be included because of the difficulty of viewing the main park feature from the park.

CRUMPLER POND

Background

Crumpler Pond is located on the south side of the park. Access is provided off State Road 1744 by crossing private property, granted by an informal agreement with the landowner. A permanent access from State Road 1744 is needed for park staff. The Crumpler Pond area currently contains a pond, much smaller than it used to be since the earthen dam broke. It may be desirable to repair the dam and restore the pond, or it may

be better to leave it as is for wetland habitat. The pond area could also make a good trail destination. An old house sits along the pond, but it is in very poor condition and has been approved for demolition.



Figure VIII-1. Crumpler Pond

Recommendations

Acquire sufficient land to provide access to Crumpler Pond from State Road 1744. Some investigation is needed to determine what would be involved in rebuilding the dam and restoring the pond. The park superintendent will consult an engineer to obtain an estimate of what would be involved and cost estimates for the work. If costs are reasonable, a study group will be formed to recommend whether or not to repair the dam, looking at environmental concerns, costs, and environmental and recreational use of the area. A trail that connects the pond to other park facilities should be constructed.

CAMPGROUND RENOVATIONS

Background

The current shower and restroom facility at the tent and trailer campground does not meet accessibility standards. Some camping sites need to be made accessible as well. The dump station at the campground needs to be improved in order to meet health and safety codes.

Recommendations

Renovation of the existing concrete masonry structure is not practicable, and it will be better to demolish the old structure and build a new one. Revise the existing tent and trailer campground capital improvement project to include a new washhouse and the accessibility needs. Construction staff will get the park superintendent information and contact persons to fix the problems at the dump station. Park staff will install a “non potable water” sign.

ACCESS ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

Background

The park's access roads are in very poor condition and are in need of repair. These roads provide vehicular access for resource management, maintenance, and emergencies. These dirt roads suffered significant damage with hurricanes and other storms in recent years. The access road to the swimming lake is especially important for emergency access.

Recommendations

Park staff will undertake these needed road repairs with funding assistance to come from major maintenance funds.

SWIM AREA PARKING LOT DRAINAGE

Background

A portion of the swim area parking lot drains directly into the lake. The drainage should be corrected to protect water quality by installing new drainage pipe or by creating sediment ponds to catch the parking lot runoff.

Recommendations

Construction staff will consult with a soils engineer and investigate the possibility of adding this work item to the currently ongoing Lake Area Safety Improvements project. If the work item cannot be added to the ongoing project, it will be included as a part of the newly created trail improvement project.

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